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Editorial: Down with the rebel flag

Kokomo Tribune editorial board

THE ISSUE

Even after Charleston tragedy, the Confederate battle flag still flies above the South Carolina Statehouse.

OUR VIEW

We applaud Republican South Carolina state Rep. Norman “Doug” Branno’s announcement of introduction of legislation to remove this treasonous symbol.

Like many young men, Dylann Storm Roof, 21, uses established symbolism to give form to his otherwise confused identity. His Facebook page features a photo of him wearing a jacket emblazoned with the flags of two admittedly racist countries.

“That would be apartheid South Africa, which you might be aware of, and Rhodesia, which is a little less known,” reported Vox’s Zack Beauchamp on Thursday. “Rhodesia used to be where today’s Zimbabwe is. It was a terribly racist country, akin to apartheid South Africa, and became a sort of

cause celebre for white supremacists in the 1960s and 1970s — one they still mythologize today.”

On Wednesday evening, Roof walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina — one of the oldest black houses of worship in the country. For about an hour, Roof participated in Bible study with a dozen others before pulling a .45 caliber handgun, uttering racist statements and opening fire. Ten were shot, nine of whom died: Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Reverend and state Sen. Clementa C. Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton and Myra Thompson. Roof was apprehended the following morning in North Carolina during a traffic stop.

Not surprisingly, Roof is also fond of the Confederate battle flag, taking several photos of him with it, and even attaching a novelty “Confederate States of America” license plate to his vehicle.

“I hate the sight of the American flag,” read a portion of a manifesto found on his website.

While the nation mourned, the visuals at the South Carolina Statehouse in Columbia spoke volumes.

“The U.S. and South Carolina flags were lowered in mourning but [the Confederate flag] was left flying at its full height,” reported Schuyler Kropf of The Post and Courier on Thursday.

The fact this treasonous banner was allowed to fly on government property in the first place is staggering.

“[Signed in 2000,] the South Carolina Heritage Act decreed that just about all other tributes to Confederate history would be virtually untouchable,” reported CNN’s Tom Foreman on Saturday. “The only way to change anything of that nature ... would be to gain the endorsement of two-thirds of lawmakers.”

On Friday, Republican South Carolina state Rep. Norman “Doug” Branno, told MSNBC’s Chris Hayes he would be introducing legislation in December to remove this symbol from the Statehouse.

“I had a friend die Wednesday night for no reason other than he was a black man,” Brannon told Hayes in a phone interview. “Sen. Pinckney was an incredible human being. ... I’m gonna introduce the bill for that reason.”

We applaud Rep. Branno for his courage on this issue. For how can we truly say we mourn the victims of this racist terrorist attack if we still fly this outdated flag of oppression over government offices?